

PROJECT RUGVIN PROJECT RUGVIN ANNUAL REPORT 2005

Introduction

Project Rugvin originated from collaboration between the Centre of Environmental Science (CML, Leiden University), The Dutch North Sea Foundation (SDN in Utrecht) and the overall co-ordinator Frank Zanderink. The idea of starting these monitoring activities resulted from the need to do more research on cetaceans and inform the Dutch public about the presence of cetaceans in the North Sea. With the financial help of the VSBfonds, WWF Netherlands (AVGN-fonds) and the hospitality of Stena Line, Project Rugvin started its first year of monitoring cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins and whales) in the North Sea in 2005.

The project

Project Rugvin comprises two monitoring programs. The first includes surveys carried out on Stena Line ferries on the route Hoek van Holland (NL) to Harwich (UK). This research was conducted by Nynke Osinga as part of her final thesis of the master Biology at Leiden University. The surveys were carried out from the bridges of the ferries Stena Hollandica and Stena Britannica of the Stena Line company. After the month June this project continues on a monthly basis for another year. On each survey a volunteer assisted as a second observer.



The Stena Hollandica (Photo: Stena Line)

The second monitoring programme established by Project Rugvin includes surveys more close to the shore. A zigzag transect was carried out close to the Dutch coast line using a small motorboat (in most cases the ms Dickson). This project was coordinated by Frank Zanderink and Nynke Osinga. Next to the coordinator at least three volunteers were present as observers.



The ms Dickson (Photo: via Daan Wouwenaar)

The research

Science is needed to identify the main threats cetaceans face in the Dutch North Sea. Threats might include amongst others anthropogenic influences like over fishing, by-catch, disturbance and noise pollution. Once the distribution of cetaceans is mapped and the main threats are identified, conservation strategies can be improved.

On the ships *Hollandica* and *Britannica* of the Stena Line 18 surveys were conducted, 12 in the first half year on behalf of Nynke Osinga's studies and 6 in the second half year of 2005. Together with the crew, 230 animals were spotted in the first half year. Harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) (60 %) as well as white beaked dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) (40 %) were observed. See for more detail the report: "Monitoring of cetaceans in the North Sea, the RIKZ aerial surveys and the Stena line ferry surveys" by Nynke Osinga.

Survey month	Harbour porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>)	Whitebeaked dolphin (<i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i>)
January	0	11
February	20	4
March	88	35
April	26	13
May	13	5
June	12	3
July	8	13
August	2	7
September	0	0
October	0	0
November	7	0
December	3	1
Total	179	92

- 1) Next to the sightings during the surveys, this table includes the incidental sightings done by the Stena Line personnel.
- 2) It should be taken into account that in the first part of 2005 two surveys were carried each month whereas in the second part of the year only one survey was carried out each month.

In 2005 a total of ten surveys was carried out on an aquastar (11,75 m), called the Dickson (all surveys were held on board of the m.s. Dickson except for one time on the m.s. Miranda). In total 13 surveys were cancelled due to bad weather circumstances (Sea state > 4 Beaufort) (the possibility to detect cetaceans, especially porpoises, decreases with increasing sea state).

Statistics of 2005 on board of small vessels.

Survey date	Average sea state (Bft)	Number of cetaceans	Rare or special Sea birds	Number of volunteers	Ambass.	Boat	Co-ordinator
14-04	3-4	0		4	-	Dickson	Frank & Nynke
12-05	4	0		2	-	Dickson	Frank & Nynke
22-05	4-5	0		4	-	Dickson	Frank
27-06	2-3	0		3	-	Miranda	Nynke
09-07	4	0	Sea eagle	4	-	Dickson	Frank
11-07	4-5	0	-	2	-	Dickson	Nynke
18-08	3	8 + 3 dead	Sea Ducks	3	2	Dickson	Frank
04-09	3-4	1		5	0	Dickson	Nynke
23-09	3-4	0	Sea eagle Gannets	4	2	Dickson	Frank
07-10	0-2	9		3	2	Dickson	Nynke
10 surveys		18			6		



White beaked dolphin (Photo: via Daan Wouwenaar)

In total 18 Harbour porpoises were spotted on three of the ten surveys, also two dead porpoises and a dead Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) were observed. The dead Minke Whale was encountered on August 18th a few miles out near the coast of Scheveningen. It was a young animal of about 2.90 m (excluding the tail) and it seemed not to be dead for a long time. It was lacking its tail, probably the animal got stuck in a fishing net and was cut loose by a fisherman. It is possible that the mother of the animal was also nearby, but there is no proof of that.



Dead young Minke whale (Photo: Frank Zanderink)

Next to cetaceans, other wildlife was observed as well. At times of off-shore wind, many insect and bird species, which usually only occur on land, were seen far out at sea. Bees, wasps, humblebees, mosquitoes, flies, butterflies and ladybirds. But also terrestrial song birds were resting on the Dickson at one time.

Regularly seen, worth mentioning birds, were amongst others: gannets, sea ducks, skuas, sea eagles, cormorants, puffins and the European swift.

The observer team

In total 28 volunteers were placed on the list of observers for the project. Some were not able to join the surveys due to cancellation of boat surveys. In order to improve the monitoring for the season 2006 a small written inquiry will be conducted. The outcome will be presented at the volunteers day the 25th of February 2006 and will be used for improvement of the project.

List of volunteers

Joost Backx	Janet Booij	Aukje Coers
Wim van Doorn	Suzanne Duivesteijn	Esther Drewes
Bart van Engeldorp	Piet van Gisbergen	Ernestine Gordijn
Arco Haeck	Arie Hagoort	Anncik Hujbrechts
Max Janse	Marlinde Hoek	Meinke Klarenbeek
David Kleijn	Mirjam van Immerzeel	Anita de Jong
Saskia Juinen	Tessa van Ree	Marije Siemensma
Anna Sinnema	Jan Wouter Strietman	Renske Timmermans
Bert Wilbrink	Cindy Witjes	Richard Witte
Janny de Wit		

Education and information

One of the main goals of Project Rugvin is to inform the general public about the presence of cetaceans in the North Sea and to make them aware of the importance of the environmental health of the North Sea. Two strategies were applied to fulfil this goal, first media attention was looked for and second ambassadors from different companies were invited during surveys.

A press release was written in July and sent to different kinds of media (radio, newspapers, websites etc.). The press release resulted in two articles in national papers (“Reformatisch Dagblad” (January 2006) and “Spits” July 2005), a radio broadcasting in July 2005 for Radio Rijnmond and several publications on the websites (Vara’s Vroege Vogels, EUCC and SDN). Also an article for the “Natuur, Wetenschap & Techniek magazine and the Stena Line Personnel Magazine was published.

In total six ambassadors have joined the surveys at sea. More were invited, but unfortunately they were planned to join us on surveys which were cancelled. The ambassadors have spread the knowledge they gained about cetaceans in their own organisation.

At the moment of making this annual report Stichting De Noordzee is busy making the website pages for Project Rugvin operational. Interviews with ambassadors and volunteers, monitoring data, pictures and background information will be placed here.

Currently going on

The Stena Line surveys are carried out each month and will continue until June 2006. Since last December the Dutch coastguard is sending data from their vessels “Zeearend” and “Visarend” and therefore helping Project Rugvin. We hope these data will help us to map areas with high cetacean abundance. Stichting de Noordzee is currently developing posters for education onboard of the Stena Line ferries. Also information about the project will be available on the Stichting de Noordzee website soon.

Future

Currently, plans are developed for the motorboat surveys for spring, summer and autumn of 2006. For this coming season we certainly hope for better weather, more sightings and wonderful times at sea and at least the same spirit.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of all members I would like to thank the wonderful enthusiasm of all volunteers, the financial contribution of VSBfonds and WNF/AVGN, the hospitality of Stena Line, the advice of Drs. Ruben Huele of CML, the pleasant co-operation with Stichting De Noordzee, Daan Wouwenaar for his navigation skills and enthusiasm, and at the Scottish seashore we would like to thank Kevin Robinson for his promotion of Rugvin and well respected advices.

Ir. Frank Zanderink
General project co-ordinator
Drs. Nynke Osinga
Research coordinator

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